The OTA report was not completed until late in the past session of Congress and therefore legislation, which Miike and others had hoped for, was not proposed. Now that Staggers has retired, the future of the issue is uncertain.

Some pharmaceutical companies are still reluctant to put more money into research and development of vaccines because liability may still rest on their shoulders without a clear-cut federal policy. Freilich says that, although the liability issue has not been the sole factor for the drop in vaccine manufacturing, it has had a "numbing effect."

Levine of Yale says that leaving the drug companies open to liability damages related to mass immunization is risky for public health. "It's in the country's best interest to encourage drug companies to make good vaccines. If it comes to getting them to stay in business, the government should pick up the tab."

The strongest argument for the program is rooted in the concern for the injured. Frederick C. Robbins, president of the Institute of Medicine, who has had a continuing interest in immunization, says that developing a compensation program is "a reasonable thing to do, if only for the reasons of social justice."

—MARJORIE SUN

Disagreeing to Agree

The deliberations and contentions of the Panel on Science and Technology mirror the paradox of our troubled society.

—From the preface of the report of the science and technology panel of the President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties.

Presidential commissions no longer follow the comfortable patterns of the past. Dissent and discord are increasingly common in commission deliberations, and the tensions are reflected in the reports.

An example is the report of one of nine panels of the President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, that on science and technology. In the preface, the chairman of the panel, Glenn E. Watts, president of the Communications Workers of America, made clear that the panel members could not agree on the major issues. The report also carried a free-swinging dissenting statement by one of the five panel members, J. Fred Bucy, Jr., president of Texas Instruments.

J. Fred Bucy, Jr.
Taking exception

Because of the November election, the commission had the bad luck to be reporting to a President no longer able to implement its recommendations, but the science panel's discussion is worth noting because it focuses on a watershed issue in science policy for the 1980's.

As panel chairman Watts put it in the preface, "The most significant split among panel members seems to center on the relationship between science and technology and social life. Some placed heavy emphasis on the need . . . to involve the public in the management of science and technology in order to meet the public's perceived needs. Others are most concerned about what they perceive to be the negative impact of public regulation on the future progress of science and technology."

In his dissent, Bucy takes issue even with the title of the panel report, *Science and Technology: Promises and Dangers*. "This phrase and the text that follows overemphasize the perceived dangers facing our nation. As a result, it underemphasizes the effort that is necessary to address the major technological needs of the country."

Bucy's preferred alternative? "The proper approach to meeting the technological challenges facing the country is to stress a decentralized, self-correcting structure of decisionmaking. The government has a major role to play in maintaining this type of decentralized environment."

A major theme of the panel report is that technological advance and public understanding of science "are no longer in balance." However, the report does not advocate scientific populism. In fact, the recommendation that is most likely to stir controversy can be interpreted as elitist.

> Existing policies that support basic research on a project-by-project basis also may be inadequate to maintain research capabilities at the nation's leading research institutions. Rather than trying to spread resources across as many scientists as possible, the federal government may have to concentrate scarce research funds, supporting the best scientists at a smaller number of institutions, and perhaps moving toward a system of centers of excellence in research.

Bucy rejects the proposal to create centers of excellence because he thinks that it is impossible to choose between first rate and second rate science "by some bureaucratic criteria."

Bucy not only differs on matters of substance but objects sharply to the process followed by the panel in producing the report. He notes that because of various constraints, "The views of commissioners were assessed individually, with an attempt to reach our common statement by incorporating our comments into a draft text circulated by the staff." In this failure to reach agreement by debate, Bucy sees a possibility that "the problem of the panel may well be a microcosm of the problem facing the nation at large."

What has made it difficult to reach consensus? Certainly, the politics of presidential commissions has changed. Now regarded as obligatory is "balance" in membership; that is, major constituencies must be represented. With frankness fashionable and many commission members unwilling to risk offending their constituencies, such balance virtually guarantees disharmony.—JOHN WALSH

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